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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
CONSUMER AND MARKETING SERVICE

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR CANNED GOODS

Speech by Max S. Austin, District Supervisor, Processed Products Standardization and Inspection Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, Consumer and Marketing Service, USDA, Chicago, Illinois, to the National Convention of the American Culinary Federation, McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois, 2 p.m., Tuesday, May 25, 1965.

It is a distinct pleasure to be able to associate with so many other well fed men today.

Mr. John Teas and I represent the Consumer and Marketing Service, a service-oriented agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture --dedicated to the service of consumers, of those engaged in marketing, and of producers. Its services cover a wide range. We develop the standards that are the yardsticks used to measure quality. We assist organizations such as Federal, State and County agencies, cooperative purchasing groups, and associations such as American Hospital Association (and your American Culinary Federation should you wish it) in developing buying specifications.

Among other services, C&MS operates official inspection and grading services on meats; eggs; poultry; dairy products; fresh, canned, frozen and dried fruits and vegetables; tobacco; cotton; and grain. C&MS daily gathers information and issues market news reports on livestock, grain, fresh fruits and vegetables, honey, peanuts, dairy products, poultry, rice, and cereal grains. C&MS does not issue market news reports for canned, frozen, or dried fruits and vegetables.

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Incidentally, the U.S. Department of Interior has market news and grading services for fresh and frozen and canned fish (salmon and tuna).

Now, lets come back to canned, frozen, preserved and dried fruits and vegetables that I came here to talk about. Let me give you a little of our background.

Processed Products Standardization and Inspection is a branch of the Fruit and Vegetable Division of the Consumer and Marketing Service.

Our Processed Products Standardization and Inspection Branch is made up of two sections. One is the Standardization Section. Its employees are all former inspectors, and each has gained through experience by having worked several years in food processing plants or our grading laboratories all over the country. They know what goes into making quality products. They are well-schooled and trained for developing standards. This they do through close liaison with the industry itself. A grade standard is of no use to anyone if it doesn't represent the various qualities being manufactured by the food industry. Changes occur in varieties, consumer preferences, and processing techniques. Our people must continually gather information to permit realistic changes in our standards when called for. Today we have 150 U.S. standards for canned, frozen, preserved and dried fruits and vegetables and some miscellaneous products such as jelly and preserves, honey and peanut butter. There is a checklist of these standards available to you on the table.

Next comes our Inspection Section. We have a central office in Washington, three district offices, the Eastern District in New York, the Central District in Chicago and the Western District office in San Francisco. Each of these offices has a number of area supervisory and grading offices under its wing. These are the inspection offices and laboratories whose inspectors determine the grades and issue USDA certificates and reports.

Altogether we have 600 technical employees and inspectors. They are stationed to a large extent right in the processing plants where they report on sanitation, help control quality, check fill of containers, and finally sample the finished products to determine the grades.

Others work in our area office laboratories. These inspectors visit plants at the request of either the seller or buyer and draw samples from specific lots designated by the packer. They then record codes, weights, vacuums, drained weights, and syrup densities as well as count, length, and other data. Next, they examine for scoring and quality factors such as color, uniformity of size, defects, maturity or texture, and flavor. You will soon see a demonstration of this by Mr. Teas who is assisting me today.

How do we accomplish this job of grading products? Simply by hiring well educated young people whom we can train to do the job properly. The users pay the costs of these services. We charge fees sufficient to pay our costs--no more. There are no tax dollars supporting this inspection. It is entirely voluntary and in no way regulatory.

Who uses our services and certificates? First of all, the processor. He may want an inspector in his plant for the processing season or he may need him year around. He wants to know the quality he is producing. He wants to keep his quality up. The inspector helps him by keeping a close check on the product as it moves through various stages of processing.

The packer may be selling to a Federal, State, County, or City purchasing department which asks for a certificate to cover each lot purchased. That agency may want each case stamped by the inspector with our USDA stamp in order to identify the lot. Twenty-five states as well as a few large cities, counties, and universities now require USDA inspection before delivery.

Many private agency buyers, chain stores, cooperative buyers, hotel and restaurant vendors also want a certificate with which they can tie in the code quoted on the certificate.

The processor may need the certificate to hand to either the warehousing company or to his bank in order to borrow working capital.

We have 32 grading offices on the mainland, as well as one in Puerto Rico and one in Hawaii. Most of them are in producing areas where the processing plants are. A few are in large terminal markets such as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles.

To the institutional user, grades or quality levels may mean the difference between complete satisfaction or disappointment or

saving money or spending it unwisely. If you buy and pay for U.S. Grade A pears--nice, tender, white, thick fleshed ones--but instead get hard (or soft) pinkish, thin fleshed pears, you will be disappointed. Or you can pay for Grade A snap beans which should be tender and thickly fleshed with tiny seeds, practically free from defects, and get something entirely different--tough stringy beans with large seeds and perhaps loaded with defects.

You can go the other way--buy and pay for and get a fancy whole canned tomato and then chop it up for stew or soups. You would have saved money purchasing U.S. Grade B tomatoes at far less cost.

How can you buy canned goods of the quality you want? One of the best ways is from a reputable vendor who knows quality and buys accordingly from the canner. If you are a big enough buyer, he can afford to furnish you a copy of a USDA certificate which will identify the product by can size, label, and code. The cases may even be stamped by any one of our 600 inspectors. Most of them are stationed in or near a majority of the processing plants in the United States.

As I have mentioned before, 25 or more States are buying this way right now.

What can you use for a guide? We will be glad to furnish you copies of our U.S. standards. Then, if you have not already done so, your Federation may some day wish to develop a buyer's guide such as that published by the American Hospital Association several

years ago. It briefly describes each grade. You can even work in a suggested use for each grade of each product.

The various specifications for State institutional buying usually specify only one grade. This is usually U.S. grade B unless it is a product such as orange juice or tomato juice where color is very important. You will want a wider range of choice.

Let's discuss the U.S. standards for grades of canned fruits and vegetables. Appearing first in the standard is the proper name for the product, such as canned red tart pitted cherries, or canned green beans and canned wax beans. Then there is the product description of identity. Following this are the descriptions of various styles of the product. In the instance of canned beans the styles are "whole," "whole vertical pack," "whole asparagus style," "sliced lengthwise" or "French style," "cut," "short cut," and "mixture."

Next is the brief description of each grade. Again using canned beans, the grades are "U.S. Grade A" (or "U.S. Fancy"), "U.S. Grade B" (or "U.S. Extra Standard"), and "U.S. Grade C" or "U.S. Standard," and finally "Substandard." I don't imagine many of you would relish eating or serving "Substandard" beans or "Substandard" almost anything. When a product--for instance, beans--falls this low in grade, it is for a very good reason such as maturity, color, or defects or some other factor which causes the product to be unattractive in appearance or in eating quality, though it is not spoiled and can be eaten.

Following the grade descriptions are recommended drained weights and sizes of beans.

Now come the factors of quality. Each of these are given score points ranges along with a description of each grade - A, B or C. We will illustrate this in our grading demonstration soon to follow.

My main advice to you is either know your quality of canned fruits and vegetables or depend on the services of someone who may be specialized in it. Buy the quality best fitted to your needs. Don't pay for a Grade A product unless appearance or eating quality are very important. Here I am thinking again of pears or peaches. You don't want a Grade C pear or peach when your customer is expecting a thick fleshed, tender, highly colored fruit half. It isn't likely you will want to serve hard Grade C peas when your customer is paying a fancy price for his dinner. On the other hand, you may find Grade B and Grade C canned products not only cheaper but better for certain uses. Good Grade B peas stand up better on a steam table than do very tender Grade A peas.

With your permission, Mr. Teas will demonstrate the grading factors and steps in grading of one fruit and one vegetable.

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